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Testimony of Ashley Mouta, BSW
Raised Bill 6633: An Act Concerning Stalking
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Good afternoon distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Ashley Mouta and I am a graduate student at the UCONN School of Social Work. I am testifying today on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence in support of HB 6633, "An Act Concerning Stalking". Strengthening the statutes of stalking would make tremendous strides in protecting victims and punishing offenders who intentionally harass another individual.

Stalking is defined in the general statutes as the intent to cause another person to fear for their physical safety by willfully and repeatedly following or lying in wait for the other person. According to the National Center for Victims of Crime, 3.4 million individuals over the age of 18 are victims of stalking in the United States each year. 46 percent of these victims experience at least one unwanted contact per week.

Stalking especially affects domestic violence victims because they are often stalked by their abusive partners at some point either during the relationship or after it ends. In fact 30 percent of stalking victims are stalked by a current or former partner. In a domestic violence situation, abusers are more likely to approach their victim which drastically increases the chances that the stalking behavior will escalate. Being stalked greatly impacts the wellbeing of a victim because they are put in physical danger at the hands of the perpetrator, which also causes emotional distress. Stalking victims are more likely to have anxiety, insomnia, and depression than other individuals. Stalking impacts every aspect of a victim's life. 1 in 8 employed victims are forced to miss time from work

due to the stalking and 1 in 7 victims move as a result of their victimization. Stalking causes traumatic and often long lasting affects for victims and their families.

HB 6633 will further protect victims of stalking by placing harsher punishments on individuals convicted of stalking. The current stalking statute does not cover many of the behaviors offenders use to target their victims such behaviors as GPS monitoring and other forms of electronic victimization. These additions are imperative to the protection of victims because most offenders use more than one mode to stalk and harass their victims. Because these methods are not included in the current definition of stalking, it is extremely difficult for victims to prove that they are being stalked in a court of law. Updating the definition and methods of stalking in the statute will close the loophole that exists for offenders to repeatedly threaten and harass individuals through the use of technology.

It is vital that the Committee support HB 6633 and strengthen the protection for victims of stalking and punishments for perpetrators of stalking. HB 6633 will improve the current laws to better address the issues of stalking and how the forms of the crime have changed over time.

Thank you for your consideration.